

March 8th, 2022

Senator Slap, Representative Elliott, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Seth Freeman, and I am a Professor at Capital Community College and the President of the Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges (4Cs). Our union represents full and part-time faculty and staff at the twelve community colleges and adjuncts at the University of Hartford.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of **HB 5300** *An Act Requiring Legislative Approval For the Merger or Closing of Institutions Within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities and Prohibiting the Consolidation of the Regional-Technical Colleges*

So much has been said about the merger of our twelve Connecticut community colleges. This process has been extremely painful, disruptive, and challenging for both CSCU administrators advocating for the merger, and faculty, staff and students being impacted by it.

The reason community college faculty and staff, our community allies, alumni, and so many others are **still fighting** this merger, is because it was a bad plan when it came out, and it is a bad plan, and now a bad structure, now.

Community college faculty and staff maintain that the merger of our twelve Connecticut community colleges was never designed to either (a) improve our colleges, or (b) advance equity. We maintain now, as we did five years ago, that the merger is about creating a simpler, cheaper system. The merger is akin to a **downsizing**. A simultaneous reduction of faculty and staff across our community college campuses, with a ballooning of managers at the System Office.

If we follow the money, we see this merger is simply a diversion of state resources and funding away from community college campuses to system managers in Hartford and New Britain. This results in gross layers of redundant and wasteful system management. Along with the transfer of funding and resources is the transfer of decision-making abilities. The merger has already resulted in resources and decision-making abilities being taken away from faculty, staff, and administrators who are closest to our students.

CSCU managers point to dire enrollment figures, high school graduation trends, and budget deficits as a need to **do something**. We want to acknowledge that our system does face severe challenges, and yes – we do need to do something. But, simply put, CT State Community College, is not the answer. There were always other solutions to be found if CSCU administration *worked in partnership* with their college faculty and staff. But working together was never the goal of former CSCU President Ojakian, nor sadly is it now the goal of current CSCU President Cheng.

Faculty and staff also remain frustrated that CSCU managers point to real benefits of “Students First”, like seamless transfer, and better resourced and improved advising through the Guided Pathways model. What they **never say**, however, is that those changes could have been implemented without moving our colleges to a single accreditation. They never acknowledge this simple truth.

Community college faculty and staff are tired of this merger. We are saddened and deeply demoralized in seeing our colleges being eroded to “branch campuses” by the day. We are tired of seeing our local management have more and more power taken away from them. We are tired of the mismanagement, deception and obfuscation of CSCU managers.

Our vision is to have independent, diverse, fully-functional community colleges across our state. Colleges that are able to uniquely meet the needs of our diverse student populations. Colleges where faculty, staff, and local managers are empowered and resourced to best serve our students.

Please choose our vision. Please don’t give up on our vision based upon the falsehood that our state can’t do better than CT State Community College.

Please hear the concerns of the faculty and staff in our community college system.

Please approve HB5300.

Thank you committee members again for all of your hard work.